

The Emergence of Communication Intellectual History in Sukhothai and Ayutthaya Kingdom of Thailand

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Abstract

The article on “The Emergence of Communication Intellectual History in Sukhothai and Ayutthaya Kingdom of Thailand” is a part of research on “The Intellectual History of Communication in Thailand”. This paper presents the emergence of new things in communication intellectual history of Thailand in both kingdom. The research methodology was a qualitative research using a concept of genealogy approach.

The study found that the “Foundation of Communication Episteme” in Sukhothai and Ayutthaya Kingdom emerged various types of communication and most of roles of communication were formal power of rulers in order to “produce, create, or construct knowledge” by emphasizing on “prohibition, classification, and exclusion” according to social power and context of such period. Rulers from royal institution exercise power through interpersonal communication both in daily life and formal communication in public. In Sukhothai Kingdom, there was a common faith of “Ban – Muang” (household – city) in an ancient Siam, under an Absolute Monarchy. The kings and elites had a power to construct social reality or knowledge both verbal and non-verbal language by a faith, norm, culture, power, and social context through some types of interpersonal communication (face-to-face), public (formal) communication, and integrated communication in political and so on. The kings in such period ruled the country by a “Paternalism” and “Dhammaracha” form, so they communicated with their inhabitants and helped solving their problems as a leader of big family, so called “Phor Khun” (a father). In this peaceful kingdom, Phor Khun played the highest role as a sender using rhetoric and Thai alphabet as a representative of religion and politics. There were both transmission model and ritual model of communication on public sphere as well as in Ayutthaya Kingdom. By a faith of “Khmer or Hindu’s Dhevaracha” form of an Absolute Monarchy, the kings and commander in chief of Ayutthaya Kingdom had a right and power as a kingship to divide inhabitants to be a voiceless by gazing or observation, especially during a crisis or a war. But once they derived a concept of western development, individual then accepted the control of opinion leaders and experts that well educated and so powerful, both Siamese and foreigners, such as noblemen, ambassadors, trade agents, and missionaries. Those phenomena seemed like a power of the kings on discursive practices as a subject. The main types of Communication at that time included interpersonal, public, traditional, integrated, and emergence of mass communication in printed media.

Keywords: Communication, Intellectual History, Kingdom of Thailand

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Introduction

The study on “ The Intellectual History of Communication in Thailand” aims to investigate history of Communication Arts, Journalism, and Mass Communication of Thailand in order to explore how discourses in the field of Communication emerges and evolves from Sukhothai Kingdom to Rattanakosin Kingdom by using Michel Foucault’s genealogy approach as a conceptual framework for historical document analysis.

Using the investigation on genealogy in order to reveal the periods of emergence reflecting the trace of power struggle and ruling that may cause some problems or conflicts in the past without emphasizing on chronological development or rules of science. (Foucault, 1977: 154 – 155) Consequently, it leads to the proposal of the researcher that the study on Thailand’s Communication should be classified into 4 periods upon the condition of power originating knowledge on Communication including: 1) foundation of Communication; 2) establishment of Mass Media profession; 3) emergence of Communication Technology; and 4) Media Reform and Communication Studies. This article presents information on the first period: “ A Foundation of Communication” by emphasizing on establishment of Communication knowledge in Sukhothai Kingdom and Ayutthaya Kingdom. There were various objects emerge and continuously transformed. However this extensive point of view of Foucault did not explain explicit method to approach knowledge and facts. As a result, it was necessary for the researcher to apply qualitative data collection and analysis to reach this conceptual finding as well as interpretation of the following evidence:

1. “The Sukhothai Stone Inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng”, that is, the inscription of Thai ancient alphabet in Sukhothai period or B.E. 1835 found and recorded by King Rama IV when he was holding the position of heir apparent to the Thai throne in B.E. 2467. King Rama IV read this script and it was published by Vajirayana Library.

2. Royal Chronicle” , that is: 1) Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya (Luang Prasert Aksornnit’s version: B.E. 2450); 2) Royal Autograph Chronicle of Siam (B.E. 2505); 3) Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya (Somdej Phra Phonnarat, Phra Chetupon Temple’s version: B.E. 2514; Bradley’s version was firstly published in B.E. 2407); and 4) Royal Chronicle of Rattanakosin in the Reign of King Rama II (Chao Phraya Dibakarawongsa (Kham Bunnak) B.E. 2553).

To explain foundation of Communication in Thailand for investigating the trace of emergence, it was necessary to look back to social, economic, and political context of Siam in the past centuries.

Results

“Foundation of Thai Communication” presented in this paper started from the period of Sukhothai Kingdom (B.E. 1792 – 2126) to Ayutthaya Kingdom (B.E. 1893 – 2310). Many historical documents specified consistently about the social power and context in “Sukhothai Kingdom” that there were 9 kings utilizing two ways of “Absolute Monarchy” regime to rule the country. The early Sukhothai period started from establishment of Sukhothai Kingdom in B.E. 1792 when Phor Khun Sri Intaratit, the first king of Sukhothai Kingdom, cooperated with Phor Khun Pha Mueang, to establish Phra Ruang Dynasty under “Paternalism” form of Absolute Monarchy regime due to small area of the kingdom and respect paid by people in all classes to the ruler as their own father. Both classes including ruling class (king, masters, elites, noblemen, commander in chief, and Buddhist supreme patriarch) and ruled class (villagers, servants, and slaves) preferred calling their ruler as “Phor Khun” upon the roles and duties in protecting them and families. This kingdom was distinctive on society and culture, especially religious and tradition. (2nd side of Stone Inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng) Subsequently, in the late period of the reign of Phraya Lithai when the influence

of Buddhism approached Thailand, “Dhammaracha” regime was applied causing the distance between the ruler and subordinates increasingly. At that time, the king played the highest role as the representative of religion and politics. In overall image, Sukhothai Kingdom was a peaceful and civilized city without preference in using battle for solving conflicts, but for only expanding territory.

“Ayutthaya Kingdom” (B.E. 1893 – B.E. 2310) continued Absolute Monarchy regime called “Dhammaracha” with the overlapped growth, i.e., it was still the period of re-establishing as shown in several royal chronicles. This kingdom began from the accession to the throne of King U-thong. There were 16 colonies and ruled by 5 dynasties including U-Thong, Suvarnabhumi, Sukhothai, Prasart Thong, and Ban Plu Luang, with 34 kings (included with Khun Worawongsatiraj). Accordingly, this kingdom lacked of unity in some situations leading Thailand to face with power struggle among royal families therefore Thailand had to encounter with wars from both insiders and outsiders. (Royal Autograph Chronicle of Siam, B.E. 2505: 305)

Social organization was started in the reign of King Borommatri Lokkanart who ruled the throne for the longest period in this kingdom 40 years in total as same as his Suvarnabhumi Dynasty. The reformed governmental affairs consisted of central ruling and regional ruling as well as dividing the operation of military sector and civil sector clearly. Moreover, the King also enacted Feudalism Act (B.E.1998) in order to divide personal rights and duties, whereas, elite class had the highest power for ruling workforce and military. This was considered as the closed system with descent in the form of divine king. For noblemen or government officers, it was an opened system giving some opportunities to anyone with ability and high performance to a higher class.

According to this study, there was some empirical evidence showing that most kings of Ayutthaya Kingdom desired to battle with nearby kingdoms including Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos (Lan Chang Kingdom) as well as strived to expand their territory continuously. Moreover, they often showed their military force in various forms including being the commander of the military in wars, holding some parties to celebrate victory, executing the rebels or their opponents, and sometimes there was someone assumed power from the King via a coup d’etat. (Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, B.E. 2407: 1 – 2, 268, 462)

Among conflicts and power struggle in the kingdom, trading partner countries such as Japan, China, and France, started to play more social and economic roles. After wars, Thailand’s kings and elites, especially King Narai the Great, emphasized on making an alliance with other countries throughout the world such as Portugal, China, Holland, Spain, Japan, England, and France. However, sometimes they did not get along with each other due to some disadvantages caused by the treaties. (Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, B.E. 2514: 331 – 332, 612 and Royal Autograph Chronicle of Siam, B.E. 2505: 213)

In the reign of King Boromracha 3, wars occurred again when Myanmar army was able to occupy Chiang Mai successfully in B.E. 2304 causing Ayutthaya lost provinces both north and south. Although some western countries, such as England, promised to help Thailand, but they finally ran away in the critical situation. (Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, 649 – 651) There were only villagers of Wiset Chiacharn Village in Singkaburi and Sankaburi who were robbed and arrested by Myanmar soldiers therefore they established a large camp at Phoe Kao Ton Temple in “Ban Rajan Village” (They have been recognized as Thai heroes: “Bangrajan villagers”). This group of Thai ancestors had great effort in battle as the outpost of Ayutthaya palace for long period. However, when his leaders, Phra Ajarn Thammachote, Khun San, Nai Tan, Nai Thongmen, and Nai Chan Nuad Kheaw, were dead and there was no support on weapons from the capital city, villagers had no power to resist Myanmar army and these villages were beaten finally. Such event was ended by the loss of

Ayutthaya for the second time in B.E. 2310, therefore the total period of Ayutthaya Kingdom was 417 years. (Royal Autograph Chronicle of Siam, B.E. 2505: 269 – 276)

Such relationship with other countries as mentioned above reflected conditions of the country and the thought of rulers that had been changing upon periods and social context. The kings had both an old paradigm towards fighting for territories and the modern attitude in leading country to new perspective for exchanging resources, innovations adoption, and learning some sciences from other countries. Accordingly, the relationship can be divided into 2 dimensions, i.e., diplomacy (politics) and trading (economics). For Asian countries, it could be seen clearly that the alliance could be divided into 2 groups including: 1) China and Japan emphasizing on trading and military support; and 2) neighboring countries such as Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Malaysia. Anyway, the relationship with these countries was not stable due to some wars fighting for the land, while the companionship with some “western countries in Europe” (e.g., Portugal, Holland, Spain, English, and France) had the main goals on trading and religion via trading representatives and missionaries. However, based on the study, it was found that most western diplomatic corps had the politics agenda as the colonial countries occupying some territories around Ayutthaya. Several kings recognized such hidden agenda, so they tried to compromise and negotiate in order to avoid the loss of the territory as well as to prevent diplomatic disadvantages. This kind of situation occurred continuously to Rattanakosin Kingdom.

Thai communication intellectual history or genealogy in Sukhothai Kingdom and Ayutthaya Kingdom was found as follow:

1. Emergence of Thai Communication in “Sukhothai Kingdom”

According to evidence found on “The Sukhothai Stone Inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng” and “Royal Chronicles” as mentioned above, both kingdoms were in the period of establishment. Although it was occurred in different period, the growth and decline was overlapped, i.e., when the new kingdom was glorious, the old one had to be declined. The kings used “Absolute Monarchy” regime in ruling the country with 2 forms of rulers, including “Paternalism” (Phor Khun) and “Dhammaracha” (King). There were two classes, “master – servants and slaves” with Buddhist priests as the “spiritual leaders”. Thai people lived with sympathy and respected each other. Consequently, communication process in “Sukhothai Kingdom” was similar to that of ancient Greek according to communication model of the first era of Aristotle (Aristotle, 300 B.C.) that was the principle of Rhetoric and Political Communication.

This period formed “interpersonal communication process” both small group (family) and public group (formal group) emphasizing on the King as the “speaker” (a “sender”) with attractive and reliable characteristics. His Majesty took a role like a leader of big family with competency in using “words” (a “message”) in all “occasions” (governing and judging grievance or complaint) with purposes of teaching, warning, or giving any reasons to “listeners” (a “receiver”) who were members of royal family, noblemen, or inhabitants, as if father looked after his children. This face-to-face communication was able to effect in various dimensions including satisfaction, faith, and loyalty towards the ruler.

The distinctive event in this kingdom connecting to emergence of communication was shown in the inscription stated that the King was pleased to build “a bell” for hanging in front of the palace’s gate in order to allow anyone in the capital city and nearby city to “ring the bell for giving grievance” and ask for support in solving their problems. Consequently, Thai had the supporter because the King listened to all complaint by himself as well as judged all cases straightforwardly. Based on the principles of Communication, this was considered as utilizing symbol (bell) as the interpersonal communication channel between

groups of different status, i.e., providing some opportunities or power to voiceless people who were majority of the society to communicate by face-to-face with the ruler (Phor Khun) leading to long-term faith that was considered as the positive impact. (1st and 2nd side of Stone Inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng).

“Phra Thaen Manangka Silabaht” (A throne) was built and located in the center of plam forest by Phor Khun Ramkhamhaeng in Saka Era 1214 (B.E. 1835) for inviting some supreme Buddhists to give Buddha’s suggestion to royal family members, noblemen, and inhabitants on Buddhist observance days and ordinary days. The King also sat on such Phra Thaen for conducting the conference and making a judgment. Therefore this area was considered as the “public sphere” connecting all groups of people to obtain information and exchange opinions under the knowledge framework mutually performed by the King and supreme Buddhists. (3rd side of Stone Inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng and Historical Archives Archdiocese of Bangkok, <http://haab.catholic.or.th>)

The king in such period utilized “face-to-face communication” consisted of verbal language (words) and non-verbal language (gesture and voice) as the important tool for working in this “public area” that was considered as the right concept for ruling because it formed the communication process similar to ritual model allowing some communication parties (e.g., ruler and followers) to play their roles in exchanging or sharing meaning and experience by understanding, reliability, and faith. That could help advantages to the political and social problems solution. (3rd side of Stone Inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng)

From primary documents, it was also found emergence of new thing in Sukhothai kingdom besides verbal language or “words”, it was “written language” or “alphabet” that were used in one-way communication from the king to his people through religious caring and some creative works on arts, literatures, and tradition. Accordingly, “Invention of Thai Alphabets” (Lai Sue Thai) was considered the important local wisdom for opening the communication world of all classes. Up till now, Thai alphabets have been used as the communication tool for over 730 years. According to the evidence on the 4th side of The Sukhothai Stone Inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng stated that the King invented Thai alphabets in Saka Era 1205 (B.E. 1826). Subsequently, there were some people interpreted that the King modified those alphabets from some Khamer Wat letters and this modification gave advantages to a knowledge distribution and public administration in the following period greatly. (George Coedes, B.E. 2467; cited in Communication of Thailand, B.E. 2533: 32; Cham Thongkamwon, B.E. 2497; Prasert Na Nakhon, B.E. 2526)

Emergence of “inscription” was considered as another important historical evidence reflecting a role of the King as the “sender” through the important “communication channel” that communicated “message” created from the royal history and duties of Phor Khun to “receivers” concretely in such period and the following periods effectively. The communication roles at that time were 1) to inform, 2) to educate, 3) to express, and 4) to persuade; by the concept of gratitude or kindness. For a concept of communication process, it could be considered as intention to provide complete information upon the principle “Who, says What, in Which Channel, to Whom, with What Effect?” that was the concept proposed by a Political Science scholar. (Lasswell's communication model, 1948) However, the result of communication through “inscription” was not easy like “judgment” because it used different communication channels with the condition that it was necessary to understand meaning of those letters and words. Accordingly, it was more complicated than spoken language. In addition, there was a high risk that the audience may be unable to “approach” such messages until they encountered with face-to-face communication to the opinion leaders like “monks” or “philosophers.”

Besides constructing identity in the form of “Phor Khun”, King Ramkhamhaeng also initiated in applying Buddhism to Dhammaracha regime and it became concrete when

the military army of Sukhothai kingdom was weak in the reign of Phra Maha Dhamma Racha I, that was also the period when Ayutthaya Kingdom was expanding its influence. The King applied Dhamma principles to their ruling, and also composed an important literature, “Tri Bhum Pra Ruang” (Three Worlds) as a ruling tool. It was strived to develop from “religious media” to be “political media” for providing political knowledge because of its content on determining the meaning of good ruler. This literature socialized readers to belief that the “good king” must have “virtues of the king” to prevent himself from an abuse of power or using power in wrong way causing any trouble to subordinates. In addition, he also indicated that having Dhamma in ruling the country certainly brought peace and happiness to people.

2. Emergence of Thai Communication in “Ayutthaya Kingdom”

Thai society in Ayutthaya Kingdom had the foundation of “interpersonal communication” as the tool for exchanging information and opinions. Besides daily life “conversation” that was performed normally in the form of “personal media”, there were another media highly used by Ayutthaya people, i.e., “public notice” or official mail (Tong Tra, Supa-Aksorn, or Baibork) for sending information and demands of the “king” or “army leaders” to the “partners” or “enemies”.

To perform strategic communication on battle in the form of interpersonal communication and face-t- face communication, especially in the reign of the famous kings such as King Naresuan the Great, “personal media” was used by emphasizing on speech including royal words, royal guidance, and regular news of army commanders or authorities through mounted scouts, diplomats, partners, and prisoners of the war, along with “other media” emphasizing on writing and symbolization including royal letters, public notes, and gifts, in order to propose messages or symbols under frame of reference in such period. Accordingly, they were able to understand the meaning mutually with the main purpose to prevent aggression of other kingdoms or other power groups in the same kingdom as well as to expand the power of the kingdom. (Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, B.E. 2514: 188 and Royal Autograph Chronicle of Siam, B.E. 2505: 134)

Moreover, in several periods of Ayutthaya Kingdom, it was found that there was emergence and existence of “traditional communication” reflecting the king’s political, social, and cultural power as well as religious royal ceremonies. Generally, there were several forms of symbolic communication, for example, the royal barge procession, entertainment for celebrating Buddha’s footprint, temples restoring, and white elephants celebration. These ceremonies were hidden with various values along with power and politics. (Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, B.E. 2514: 304 and Royal Autograph Chronicle of Siam, B.E. 2505: 45)

These royal ceremonies highly emphasized on artistic details and it was performed continuously as the familiar knowledge series inherited from Sukhothai Kingdom to Ayutthaya Kingdom. Consequently, some inhabitants organized the big event as if they were royal family members or elites: decorated grand meeting places or hold long duration for celebrating activities. However, the researcher had a notice that the importance of “traditional media” was reduced when approaching to modern period.

For a relationship with other countries throughout the world relied on conditions and limitations of each period as shown in several chronicles as well as records of Historical Archives Archdiocese of Bangkok processing documents of Thai and foreign people in various formats. (Historical Archives Archdiocese of Bangkok, B.E. 2557) Additionally, in the reign of King Narai the Great, there were some distinctive points on emergence of new influencers on communication, i.e., “foreigners”, both western and eastern who came to Thailand for trading and working for a military. It was considered as the period that Thai

society received several new ideas from outsiders. (Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya, B.E. 2514: 367 – 370 and 413 – 414)

In Ayutthaya Kingdom, the “king” and “ambassadors” had a communication power as rulers to construct knowledge and identity of foreigners. Additionally, there was “a group of missionaries” from western countries who were able to construct new knowledge through “establishing formal churches independently” according to trading treaty between Thailand and France as well as utilization of “personal media” for a religious propagation. The missionaries were able to change some patterns of living, thinking, and values of elites in such society up till now. Importantly, the new way of life also became the foundation of Thailand’s communication later. (Historical Archives Archdiocese of Bangkok, B.E. 2557)

There were some evidence subsequently found that the missionaries and others used to print Roman letters as a Thai book in the reign of King Narai the Great, i.e., “Record of Missionaries”, related to Siam in Ayutthaya Kingdom, collected by M.L. Manij Chumsai, an expert in Arts, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization or UNESCO. (Manij Chumsai, collector; cited in Anake Navikkamul, B.E. 2542 and Historical Archives Archdiocese of Bangkok)

Conclusion and Discussion

Based on the “social power and context” from the establishment of “Sukhothai Kingdom” and “Ayutthaya Kingdom”, it was the period of wars, power struggle, and territory expansion. Even in peaceful situation, there was usurpation in the kingdom. This was classified as “we fight in the wars and we (won’t) fight one another in peacefulness”. Subsequently, when Siam started to construct diplomatic and trading relationship with foreigners, especially westerners, there were some explicit evidences showing that Thai kings in such period (e.g., King Naresuan the Great, and King Narai the Great) started to open and accept modernity of some European countries (such as France). Thailand invested large amount of royal properties in building the vessels and send some ambassadors although it was a long-risked journey. In addition, Kings were also pleased to promote some foreign traders as the government officers, for example, Chao Phraya Wichayen started from serving for government service as the translator to hold the position of Samuha Nayok (a chancellor or lord). Accordingly, it was considered as the pioneer to the cultural flow in the late Ayutthaya period as well as the upstream of adjustment on lifestyle and thinking on communication by being influenced from westerns more than those from countries in the same region that were still in the situation of conflicts and wars (Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Malaysia). For China and Japan, although there were some evidences on trading in the reign of King Narai the Great, there were some conflicts as well. Consequently, economic and social relationship between Thailand and Japan was suspended. For China, it was the country with distinctiveness on trading more than military. In addition, China was obstructed from being the political or cultural model of Thailand in Ayutthaya kingdom. However, it became the important power base for building Krung Thonburi city in the following period.

Traces of emergence of intellectual history on Communication in the glorious period of “Sukhothai Kingdom” was a foundation according to social conventions and context emphasizing on “hierarchical-interpersonal communication” in various forms of verbal or written language as well as “integrated communication” among the way of life, living, religion, tradition, and culture. As a result, “communication process” had distinctive objectives in order to support the king in inheriting policies, thinking, and information to government officers, noblemen, and inhabitants through alphabet (Lai Sue Thai), stone inscription, bell ringing for informing grievance, judgment, giving a Buddhist doctrine by senior priests as well as royal ceremonies that were inherited to Thai people finally.

The overall image of “ Ayutthaya Kingdom” was still under Absolute Monarchy regime, so there was a few “freedom” as same as “Sukhothai Kingdom”. Most communication formats were “interpersonal communication” through personal media, religious media, and traditional media among wars of neighboring countries that are currently assembled as “Association of South East Asian Nations: ASEAN”. Moreover, there were some evidences on emergence of “mass communication” (publications produced by foreigner) and “political communication” in wartime or struggle for the throne. In addition, there were some traces on emergence of “marketing communication” in negotiation or construction a trading image of the country.

Normally in Ayutthaya period, there was emergence of knowledge on communication and creation of identity for the king, ambassadors, and missionaries from western world mainly. However, in the late period of the kingdom when Myanmar army occupied several provinces, there was no support from any partner to help this war. Accordingly, “Bang Rachan villagers” became the important outpost to fight in such war before the loss of Ayutthaya kingdom. As a result, communication process in this period was emerged in “crisis” of the country. Besides sending messages directly from senders, it was also found “a ritual model of communication” or participation in such communication frequently, especially between “senior priests” as “opinion leaders” and “villagers”. It was in the form of exchanging knowledge or attitude in a battlefield with the purpose to create the power of “survival” mainly as well as to negotiate on ruling among army leaders in order to bargain benefits and find the resolutions. Normally, weaker often agreed to be servants of the king and participated in Royal Ceremony of the Oaths of Allegiance or sent a tribute instead of killing each other. However, there was no one surrender in this case of war against Myanmar until it could be called as “communication breakdown”. Since the parties lacked of understanding, there was such a big damage against Siam in B.E. 2310.

“ Foundation of Communication Episteme” in Sukhothai and Ayutthaya Kingdom emerged various types of communication and most of roles of communication were formal power of rulers in order to “produce, create, or construct knowledge” by emphasizing on “prohibition, classification, and exclusion” according to social power and context of such period. Rulers from “royal institution” also intended to use power through interpersonal communication both in daily life and formal communication in public. (Paternalism, Dhammaracha, and Dhevaracha or Kingship).

Besides the kings, Thai society in both Kingdoms also had “the network of power” through “ elites” with formal power struggle as well as conflicts among “rulers”, “army leaders”, “astrologers”, or even “foreigners”. In addition, it also promoted the Buddhist priests to participate in using the technology of power through knowledge, belief, and faith directly, i.e., giving a doctrine, aiming to build understanding under the same direction as well as living together peacefully. Thai society by the late Ayutthaya was transformed the use of power through knowledge and science, so the power of “ Communication” was transformed to “new comers” (foreigners) including ambassadors, missionaries, and merchants, since there were some international relations.

In conclusion, obtaining some opportunities to review an intellectual history on “Communication” helped us understand some social power relationship in the past that many new things of this academic field emerged.

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