Abstract

This research project aims to examine "Yong" identity in Lamphun province at two levels. First, it analyses how various meanings of "Yongness" are (re)constructed in the local community of Lamphun province. Second, it also investigates how young people define "Yongness" through a production of video documentary.

My thesis found that "Yongness" emerged out of the national campaign of "localism" between the 1980s and 1990s This campaign promoted local values, encouraging local people to root back to their community and wisdom. As a result, a promotion of local culture mushroomed, outgrowing local tourism nationwide. Local cultural materials as well as other resources were thus transformed to become "cultural commodities" for sale.

Consequently, "Yongness" has become a cultural site of struggle between various sectors. While intellectuals have power to dominate knowledge about "Yongness", bureaucratic officials aim to incorporate "Yongness" as part of "Thai national identity". Meanwhile, local people try to negotiate such cultural practices to some extent.

Furthermore, my research project goes on to train young people in "Yong" villages to produce a video documentary programme. As "insiders" of the "Yong" community, these teenagers use the documentary production to (re)define and (re)interpret "Yong" identity in their own way. Namely "their" Yongness is not perceived in the same way as what those national campaigners propose. In contrast, they hybridise different cultural elements according to their socio-cultural experiences.

My research experiment which allows young villagers to produce a documentary programme makes visible that in fact, young people have power to (re)construct "Yong" identity with their knowledge and experiences. As cultural producers, they select visual images, conducting a video interview, choosing music for the programme, and writing their own video script. These video narratives reveal power relations of young "Yong" people as those who "dominate" in terms of a subject of discourses, as well as those who "are dominated" by other discourse practices at the same time.