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SUTSAN SUTTIPIKAN: GRASSROOTS EFFORTS TO PROTECT THAI IDENTITY  
THROUGH DESIGN. THESIS ADVISOR: PROF. WILLIAM S. LOGAN, Ph.D. 140 pp.

Paradigmatic shift in cultural heritage makes grassroots become the new fulcrum of conservation. Cultural heritage and cultural identity are the mutual component of each other. Cultural identity is not only to hold for identification and possession, but is also the source of meanings in cultural heritage.

Thailand, like elsewhere, is facing significant cultural challenges in the face of globalisation, tourism and estate development. On one hand, the globalised identity represents being 'fashionable', 'developed', and/or 'internationalised'. On the other hand, the global identity is perceived on comparative and competitive terms to the local Thai identity.

This dissertation is the ethno-methodological study of Thai individual, family, and community as the grassroots of Thai society to protect their local identity by utilising spatial design. The local identity is the pluralistic sense of Thai identity, which is broader than the unique sense of the national identity of Thailand. The dissertation aims to explore how Thai grassroots protect their local cultural identity by employing design language to interpret the three case studies; which are Hor Man Muang in Chiang Mai, Ban Rabiang Nam in Nonthaburi, and Phuket Old Town in Phuket.

The case studies and their settings are approached by site observation and documentation, unstructured interview, and in-depth conversation. The information from the case studies is analysed in two steps. In the first step, the information from the visual observation, the review of related documents and the assessment of local community and local identity is analysed through critical discourse analysis. The visual information from site observation and documentation and the verbal information from unstructured interview and in-depth conversation is analysed through discourse analysis. In the second step, the outcomes of the first step are jointly analysed through critical discourse analysis.

The dissertation suggests that Thai grassroots identify and represent themselves by holding different local cultural identity as the primary platform. The grassroots spontaneously put their efforts to protect the local cultural identity by asserting in their contemporary lifestyle. It also demonstrates that to protect the local cultural identity is not necessary to return into nostalgic living as in the past; but is through creative design and adaptive re-use in a responsible, profitable and sustainable manner. Method of 'mix-and-match' the local cultural identity and contemporary lifestyle is the technique that the grassroots employ to protect the local cultural identity. In addition, the dissertation signifies that Thai identity is like 'cocktail' rather than 'pure'. The Thai identity consists of many different local cultural identities depend upon the local community. The local cultural identities cannot exist without local people as a medium that represent the identity in them or in their social space.

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